NON-WESTERN IDEAS FOR DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

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A CALL FOR SHARED EXPERIMENTATION AMONG DEMOCRACIES

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It is commonly asserted that Western liberal democracy is losing credibility and that the international community must be more open to tolerating, and even encouraging, non-Western political models in developing and rising powers. Calls for non-Western forms of democracy have been around for many years but are now becoming louder and more ubiquitous. This trend can be expected to deepen as an integral element of the emerging post-Western world order.

The desire of people outside the West to contribute new ideas to democratic regeneration and to feel stronger local ownership over democracy is healthy. More needs to be done to nurture a wider variation of democratic processes and practices. This variety will be necessary to shore up democracy's long-term credibility. Forms of democracy that differ from prevailing Western norms should be encouraged rather than simply dismissed as a cloak for illiberalism or authoritarianism (though recognizing that sometimes they are).

At the same time, it is highly questionable that a wholesale non-Western variety of democracy stands perfectly defined and ready to be implemented. Indeed, the calls for

non-Western democracy exhibit many aspects that are far from convincing. Non-Western critics need to recognize that the concerns about social justice, community identity, and consensus that they frequently express as part of critiques of the Western democratic model are also present in Western debates about democratic renewal. Rather than a binary competition between Western and non-Western (or regionally specific Arab, African, or Asian) democracy, joint experimentation is needed among people in between different regions to find ways of updating the forms through which democratic accountability and representation are achieved.

Given these mixed pluses and minuses relating to the idea of non-Western democracy, is it, on balance, helpful or harmful to the overall cause of democracy that this idea is being advanced and debated in different non-Western settings? Four experts from Carnegie's Rising Democracies Network provide answers.

LATIN AMERICAN INNOVATIONS

Oliver Stuenkel, Getulio Vargas Foundation, Brazil

In Latin America, analysts' attention has focused on the way that left-wing populist regimes have come to directly challenge Western, liberal democracy. But it is necessary to look beyond the well-worn debates over *chavismo* to see how interesting innovations to democracy are emerging in Latin America.

In recent years mass protests have been staged across Latin America—in Brazil, Venezuela, Mexico, and elsewhere. New movements have been set up by young people who seek to enhance political accountability and strengthen their capacity to participate in the democratic process beyond voting in elections. Anger over corruption is often a driver of the protests, but the major concern is usually the low quality of public services because it perpetuates socioeconomic inequality.

In Brazil in particular, the young reject traditional political structures, opting for alternative ways to make their voices heard. Civil society has led an increasing number of highly original initiatives. One example is Nossas Cidades (Our Cities), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that creates digital platforms to make political engagement easier by helping citizens contact public officials responsible for specific issues, identifying others willing to work for similar causes, and pointing to politicians who have acted to protect their own vested interests.

Some NGOs are bringing together lawyers who provide free legal advice to those apprehended by the police during protests. Others denounce environmental degradation through graffiti art. Another example is the deployment of an app that tracks a congressman's voting record, tax declarations, and campaign donors. And the organizers of Ônibus Hacker (Hacker Bus), which advocates public transparency and open data, teach schoolchildren how to write legislative projects and send them to lawmakers.

Through such initiatives, activists are not so much seeking a wholesale change to the nature of the democratic regime as more effective dialogue with the government. They are driven by the hope that such civic activism will offer better ways to reduce the inequality in society.

A certain paradox remains: in Brazil's most recent presidential elections, the country's established parties were victorious, while alternatives—such as Marina Silva's "third way"—foundered. Instead, change is occurring through new types of civil society organizations. These new forms may not represent a completely different model of democracy, but they offer useful lessons to both Western and non-Western democracies around the world.

LOOKING BEYOND TRADITIONAL AFRICA
Gilbert Khadiagala, Witwatersrand University, South Africa

Ideas about and practices related to varieties of non-Western forms of democracy have a long tradition in African political analysis. They undergird some of the core assumptions about political culture, such as the legitimacy of traditional structures and consensual power sharing. Pundits perennially invoke these debates to claim an African political distinctiveness.

Cultural arguments that challenge liberal democracy in Africa have been prominent since the 1960s, when postcolonial governments started to construct one-party states. African elites mobilized the alleged power of the traditional values of consensus building, accountability, and participation to depict unique forms of African democracy. While these views remain powerful, what is also interesting is that cultural explanations justifying specifically African forms of democracy have gradually been supplemented with more pragmatic practices around state and nation building.

In the early 1990s, facing multiple pressures for pluralism, Yoweri Museveni, then and now the president of Uganda, popularized a new version of African democracy: the non-party democracy that sought to restrain political competition through a movement that Museveni strictly controlled. Although non-party democracy did not gain widespread acceptance in Africa, some of its key organizational principles still inform the practices of semiauthoritarian regimes from Ethiopia to Rwanda. In these systems, the argument that there is a uniform set of African values is often used as a tool to disarm errant political opponents.

Traditional structures have failed to gain traction in Africa's democratic innovation in part because these structures are diverse and contested even within countries. Some have been associated with egregious forms of authoritarianism, sexism,

and human rights abuses. In countries where traditional norms have been incorporated into decentralized structures, they have often fostered exclusion and failed to promote accountability and transparency. Moreover, many African leaders over the years have conjured up the power of tradition while presiding over the collapse of their states and societies.

As a result, while many in Africa seek more legitimate forms of local politics, traditions have become a sensitive and contested matter in building democracy. The dominant debate at the heart of African democracy is how to reconcile democratic values with Africa's diverse socioeconomic structures, particularly the realities of regional and ethnic fragmentation. While African countries are ultimately going to differ over how they manage these problems, there is also growing consensus among citizens about the centrality of the basic universal norms and values that constitute democracy. This budding consensus reinforces the point that people need variations in democracy rather than entirely different institutional models.

OVERSTATING THE ASIAN MODEL
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Politicians and dominant opinion makers in Asia routinely insist that the Confucian ideals of respect for authority, strong family ties, and sacrificing individual rights for the greater good represent common Asian values. They claim that these values underpin a distinctive form of democracy that is more stable and efficient than the individualistic and adversarial model of Western democracy. These values, it is commonly said, go hand in hand with the strong states and strong leaders that have made Asia the world's economic growth engine.

It is certainly true that many countries in the region can rightfully claim to have adapted democratic institutions and processes to local cultural and social conditions and produced effective governance models. Yet to say that so-called Asian values have helped indigenize democracy is too sweeping an interpretation.

These values are hardly unique to Asia. They can be found in most successful societies, be it in the Global South or the West, and they have little to do with types of democracy. Indeed, these values are much more strongly present in authoritarian states, such as China. It is a category mistake to conflate cultural and societal values with certain forms of democracy.

Rather than exhibiting consensus and uniformity, Asia houses deep diversity and variety in its institutional forms. The way diversity is managed in India and Indonesia, for example, has little to do with the famed Singaporean model. India has a strikingly adversarial political system, with ferociously competitive political parties and often a clear absence of consensus over key policies. Talking about an Asian model of democracy that patently does not describe the world's largest democracy raises serious questions about the claim.

There are undoubtedly interesting new institutional variations at work in Asia. But to argue that the region has—or should follow—a different version of democracy from that which exists in the West is not convincing. This is quite apart from the fact that most ideas about the so-called Asian model have been propounded by politicians and diplomats from Asia's semidemocratic or semiauthoritarian countries. Whatever the successes and virtues of such countries, these voices do not represent political preferences in other parts of the region.

PROGRESS AND SETBACKS IN THE MIDDLE EAST
Senem Aydın-Düzgit, Istanbul Bilgi University, Turkey

The Middle East has become central to debates on non-Western democracy, especially with the rise of the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power in Turkey in 2002 and the aftermath of the Arab Awakening in 2011. There is huge variation among the countries of the region with respect to whether they have achieved a transition to democracy. Nonetheless, it is safe to say that no state in the region has yet succeeded in expanding the Western model of liberal democracy through novel variations on individual rights, economic justice, communitarian values, alternative forms of representation, or legal pluralism. These fronts remain the subjects of local debates.

Even Turkey, probably the most democratically advanced Muslim country in the region, is suffering from what could be called a middle-democracy trap. That is, its well-known middle-income trap is now accompanied by a parallel trap of illiberal democracy. Checks and balances are being eroded, democratic institutions weakened, and fundamental freedoms curbed. Between 2002 and 2011, the country had given hope to many Arab reformers that a model going beyond Western democracy could be possible. Individual rights were widened, while expressions of Islam in the public sphere were substantially expanded. Nonetheless, this potential was wasted as the country reverted to a more limited democracy where individual rights were restricted.

What has distinguished Turkey from Egypt and Tunisia is the crucial role played by the secular rule of law in strengthening women's rights in a Muslim setting. This draws attention to the fact that calls for different, sharia-based types of legal systems as a component of non-Western democracies in the region should be treated with caution, particularly concerning matters of gender equality, and that legal pluralism should be restricted at least by a minimal understanding of secularism.

Another positive example has come recently from Tunisia, where power sharing between Islamists and secularists shows how a consensual democratic model can function, certain problems notwithstanding. Nonetheless, rather than constituting new non-Western models, these examples show the enduring importance of the core elements of the so-called Western model, such as secularism and power sharing, in those countries struggling to consolidate their democracies in the region. Hence the Middle East can be considered as still in the process of reaching minimal components of Western democracy and far from fostering non-Western democratic practices that could enrich the conceptualization and practice of liberal democracy.

RISING DEMOCRACIES NETWORK

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